1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

a widespread industry among the country people throughout Ireland. There seems even then to have been quite a widespread cottage industry in wool and linen, later to be destroyed everywhere except in Ulster. The peasantry displayed great ingenuity at the craft. The wool of their sheep was made into frieze at home, carded, spun, woven, dyed, and consumed there. Oils essential to the weaving process were extracted from fern roots, and dyes were got from alder, walnut, oak, and elderberry. This craft survives today as a cottage industry only in remote parts of Donegal and Kerry and in the Scottish highlands and isles. Such home-spinning was once widespread, probably universal. It survived here and there down to a very late date. In Ulster and northern England the industry was gradually brought into the factory, where it laid the foundation for the industrial revolution. But in the rest of Ireland industrial production of woolens was confined to Dublin by 1840 and, as a commercial enterprise, the wool trade was dead except in the region of Belfast. A few small factories survived in several towns, for example at Limerick, Clonmel, and Bandon, but there was no life or power of expansion in them.

Other manufactures originally native to the country repeat the story of wool. A few attempts at cotton manufacture died out. Linen suffered the same fate. At one time flax was grown extensively throughout Ireland, and a home industry of weaving linen was practiced widely in both town and countryside in many parts of the country. O'Brien[2] cites evidence that the older custom in linen making, strongest in Ulster, but not unknown elsewhere, by which weavers occupied plots of land and supplemented their income by farming, was gone by the famine time.

[2] George O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine* (London, New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921). See also O'Brien, *The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin and London: Maunsel & Company, Ltd., 1918).

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

as a way of getting him to start on your yarn in a hurry. If you didn't, he would not do it until he got ready. They were independent, all right, and then when they were finished, you had to reach down into your pocket and pay for what he did. There used to be a lot of weavers here, but they are all gone now. The women have got out of weaving the wool.

A weaver here, Paddy Seán R—, was a very fine fellow though he drank a lot. You cannot blame him for that because his job was a mean one and bad on the health. He worked to keep his mother out of the workhouse and till the day she died he would not let her go there. Wasn't that a decent thing for him to do? Afterwards he went to Galway and then he came back here and as an old man he died in the workhouse. But wasn't it a decent thing he would not let his poor old mother go and her going up the streets of the town every morning collecting the urine from the people who lived in the house [to use for bleaching].

These three occupations were the meaner ones in the eyes of the country people. It was not that they degraded their followers. Rather it was that they were intrinsically of less value than the more robust crafts of outdoor life. Something of the sexual dichotomization of labor was involved in this attitude equating sedentary, house-bound pursuits with the feminine spheres of activity.

The chief exponents of the robuster, more masculine crafts within local ken were the carpenter, the mason, the house builder, and the smith. But there were many others. Between the landless or "backward" cotters and laborers, who might turn their hand to anything, and the small farmers, who were themselves occasionally forced to turn to harvesting abroad or to road-mending and stone-breaking at home, there were as many specialists as there were activities in which special renown and skill could be attained. In fact, the development of local skills seems restricted only by the limits of the *matériel* which peasant life requires.

Other local experts were the thatcher, the cattle doctor or "vet," often a herdsmen with a lifelong experience of

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

homespun, buttoned up the back, and reaching well below the knees, until they reach the age of ten or eleven years. The dyes for the homespuns are obtained from plants growing on the islands; the orange used for stockings being got from a lichen (*Ramalina scopulorum*); black and brown from the purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*); blue from a small cruciferous plant; and red usually from imported madder, but sometimes from water-lily roots. Alum is used as mordant.

5. *Dwellings.*—A house consists of a kitchen, and one or two bedrooms; and it is, as a rule, built of dry stones without any mortar, though this is used afterwards for stopping chinks, and plastering the walls internally. Most of the houses are not whitewashed, with the exception of a belt around the small windows, but lime-washed houses are becoming more common than formerly. The house has two doors, front and back, both opening directly into the kitchen: and the windows are situated only on the front of the house; they are of very small size, and seldom made to open; yet, often, small as they are, they are nearly filled up, so as to leave only from six inches to a foot square of glazed surface. The chimneys and fireplaces are of the usual type found throughout the rural districts of Ireland, except that in some cases the chimney, after rising perpendicularly nearly to the top of the wall, turns outwards and opens as a square hole in the gable. The roof is straw thatch, laid on over "scraws" of grass turf, and held down by a net-work of sougans (straw ropes), to the ends of which heavy stones or long pieces of timber are attached. The gable of the house is stepped, so that the thatch when laid on does not project over the end wall, and is sealed down, to prevent water getting under it at this part, by a plastering of clay.[1] The thatch is put on fresh every year, a new layer being laid over the older ones, until the lowermost layer is thoroughly saturated with smoke, and quite rotten, when the whole is stripped off and used as manure. The floor is of beaten clay in the kitchen, but the bedrooms are sometimes boarded. The most expensive material used in building a house is wood, which is very scarce, and is usually obtained from drift wood, washed up after a storm, in which way large beams often reach the islands. It is owing to this scarcity of material, and the people having to build their own houses, that there are so few outbuildings or cattle-sheds, and that the dwelling-houses are so small. The furniture is scanty, and testifies to the poverty of the people. A few

[1] "Houses thatched in this manner are called on the west coast *tighthe cruithte*, i. e. 'shaken houses,' in contrast to the *tighthe fuaighte* 'stitched houses,' in which the thatch is tied on by ropes or cords."—REV. E. O'GROWNEY.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

291 the town, where they sit down by the roadside, and put on their boots and stockings, taking them off again when starting for home.

The old-fashioned frock or kilt-shaped garment, made of red or grey homespun, and buttoned up the back, is still worn by boys up to twelve years of age.

The dress of the women is on the whole less changed than that of the men. Many of the elderly women wear the white-frilled cap, others have a small red kerchief tied under the chin. Over the shoulders a shawl of tartan or other striking pattern is folded, but this is not so frequently of a bright red, as in other districts, as the darker colours seem to be more in favour; beneath the shawl is a boddice of some dark material. The petticoat is short, but is only occasionally the typical red homespun of the western peasant. It is often grey, or dyed purple, blue, or some other bright colour, and is sometimes ornamented by a few rows of black braid. Aprons of check are much worn. Many of the older women wear the heavy blue cloak with cape and hood on Sundays and holidays. The younger women to a large extent copy modern fashions on festive occasions, but the result is not happy, as their taste in colours is curious, and they certainly look better in native costume.

286 A great variety of homespuns are made in the district, there being several weavers who turn out coarse flannel, tweeds, and friezes, some of which are very good specimens of hand-loom work. The dyes 386 are nearly all imported, indigo and the made-up aniline dyes being [824] most used. Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), which was at one time pretty generally employed for this purpose, is now only used for dying stockings.

342 5. *Dwellings.*—The habitations of the people present considerable variety, some being extremely poor, others of a fairly good class. The description given below applies solely to the houses of the people of the rural parts, and not to Belmullet (which is a cleanly and well-built little town, composed almost entirely of good-slated houses of two stories) nor to the houses of the proprietors or large holders.

Of late years there has been much improvement in the style of dwelling, but few indeed of the old turf cabins remain; while the semi-subterranean huts, some of which were inhabited in 1841, have become altogether extinct.

The *Parliamentary Gazetteer* (1846) describes the majority of dwellings as being built partly of stone and partly of turf, and consisting of only one or at most two rooms.

An average dwelling now is built of stone, sometimes dry, at others

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Scallop shells were put to many uses and were often a substitute for the iron oil-pan of the open-wicked crusie. Seashells were also burnt to make lime for whitewashing the houses.

In late summer the sprat come ashore in vast numbers on the west and south coasts, so that in Donegal 'they constituted the chief food of the peasantry during three or four months of the year.'[1] They were taken from the water in buckets and sieves, and the mackerel pursuing their prey close against the rocks might be caught almost as easily. In Waterford harbour there were specially erected wickerwork head weirs to take the sprat; and Dr. Went has described a wattled sprat-weir in working order in the estuary of the Blackwater.[2] Fishing from the rocks, too, is most popular in harvest time and though now little more than a pastime it once provided a reserve of food for the winter. About hay-harvest the ballan wrasse is at its best, 'when the flags (wild iris) are in bloom', they say. Known as bavin, byan, morran and by other names, it is now despised nearly everywhere, as is the coalfish which was salted and dried and which has different names in Gaelic for every stage of its growth to demonstrate its former importance and popularity. 'Glassan' oil was the luminant for the crusie lamps in Rathlin Island. On the north coast you may see anglers 'frassing' for small coalfish, that is attracting them by spitting into the water chewed potatoes or limpets. Formerly ground bait was made by pounding limpets in rock basins of the type known as 'bullauns' (Fig. 90). Occasionally you may come across a fisherman casting a feather lure for pollack with a line made wholly or in part of horsehair. One method of twisting these lines, with quills, will be described in the following chapter. For short lengths next the hook—the fine foot-lines—white hair is preferred, and I have seen it made in County Down by twisting the hair between the bare thigh and a hand dusted with wood ash, a method practised by 'primitives' in many parts of the world. Two strands of from fifteen to twenty hairs are twisted on each other. (The anglers in the Seine at Paris are also said to prefer a 'crop' made from a grey mare's tail.) To

[1] 'Kinnfaela', *The Cliff Scenery of South-Western Donegal*, 19.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *Antiquity*, 25 (1951), 32–35.